

**Department of
Veterans Affairs**

Memorandum

Date: April 22, 2002

From: Assistant Deputy Under Secretary for Health (10N)

Subj: VISN Emergency Operations Center

To: Network Directors (10N 1-23)

1. The purpose of this letter is to establish VISN Emergency Operations Centers (EOC). These centers are primarily to provide communications and coordination in the event of a national or regional threat and/or event. Accordingly they are to function as a conduit to and between the VISN facilities as well as to the Department level of Veterans Affairs as the event may dictate. These centers will function similar to the ones established for the Y2K transition. The VISN EOC will also provide the physical space and supporting communications infrastructure to exercise command and control of VISN facilities in an emergency.
2. If the Network Office is in leased space, you must locate your Emergency Operations Center in a VA medical center. This will ensure that the center has power, communications, and other needed resources which cannot be in leased space.
3. The VISN shall appoint an Emergency Operations Center coordinator who will staff the center during and immediately after any potential threat or event that requires activation of the center. This coordinator should be a senior member of the VISN or VAMC staff and be familiar with how the center will activate, operate and phase out as circumstances so dictate. The coordinator will arrange for additional EOC staffing as may be required to sustain continuous operations for the period of the emergency.
4. VISNs that already have Emergency Operations Centers operational may continue them in use. However, they must be located in a VAMC and meet the minimum requirements described in Attachment A.
5. VISNs shall establish Emergency Operations Centers within 60 days of the receipt of this letter. The VISN shall test its operation at least semi-annually. Tabletop and communications exercises will also be conducted at the national level. When initiated, VISN participation in these exercises will count toward the semi-annual testing requirement.
6. Questions concerning the Emergency Operations Centers should be directed to Arnold B. Bierenbaum at 202-273-5844.

Laura J. Miller

Attachment A: Functional Requirements for Emergency Operations Centers

Overview: The primary purposes of the VISN Emergency Operations Center (EOC) are communications and coordination. As a communications and coordination activity it functions as a conduit between the VISN medical facilities, as well as a conduit to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Readiness Operations Center (ROC). In this capacity, in an emergency or other crisis, it facilitates communications and coordination upwards from the VISN and its medical activities to VA level, and downwards to the medical facilities and other activities within the VISN. The VISN EOC, when populated with the VISN Director or designated representative, also provides the additional elements of “command and control” to direct, as necessary, VISN health care resources in response to a disaster, emergency, or crisis situation.

Functions: Incorporated within these four “primary” activities (i.e., command, control, communications, and coordination) are the following EOC functions:

- **Coordination** focuses on response-generated demands and requests and ensuring that the resources needed in response to the event are (1) identified and acquired and (2) are working together.
- **Decision-making** focuses on implementation of certain actions or strategies for handling the response to the disaster, crisis, or emergency.
- **Operations Management** involves not only the actual deployment of resources, but also the continuous monitoring of the response, review (including the potential for new threats), and possible reassignment of resources.
- **Information Gathering** involves the collection and dissemination of a variety of disaster-relevant information as well as storing it for future use (for example to back-up reimbursement requests or development of after-action reports.)
- **Public Information/Affairs** involves coordination and interface with both internal and external public affairs and medical activities.
- **Reporting** involves the dissemination of information both up and down the chain of command and would include, for example, the issuance of Situation Reports (SITREPs).

Communications: The most critical and essential physical component of the VISN EOC is communications, for without the ability to communicate the EOC cannot perform any of its essential activities or functions. In providing communications to the EOC there are two primary considerations. First that there be “backup” systems in place (e.g., emergency power

to power the equipment) and (2) that there be redundant means of communicating. Accordingly, every VISN EOC should have in place, or access to, the following capabilities:

- Telephone
- Fax
- Outlook and E-mail Access
- Satellite Phone
- Video and Audio Conferencing Capability
- Pagers/Cellular Phones
- A SHARES Manual/ (Hard copy or on CD)
- GETS Card
- Television w/VCR
- Video/Data Projector (if possible)
- Emergency Power (Generator, UPS, etc)
- Emergency Lighting (if not on full emergency power back-up)
- Capability to operate from a secondary site if the EOC becomes non-habitable

Physical Location The VISN EOC would be established in an available conference room or similar space at a VISN VAMC. The obvious requirement being that this area has, or has immediate access to, the necessary communications and back-up systems to ensure functionality.

Activation and Staffing: Activation and staffing of the EOC is to be specified in the VISN Emergency Operations Plan. The Plan shall address activation of the EOC for less than 24/7 staffing coverage and include a duty officer or other point of contact (POC) to contact during those hours when there is not a physical presence in the EOC. During times when not activated, the EOC facilities and equipment needs to be inspected and periodically tested so the center can be rapidly activated in time of crisis.